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STOP THE WAR AGAINST IRAQ

Demonstrate: Saturday 12 April
2003, London, 12 noon

Called by the Stop the War Coalition.
Details 020 7053 2155/6
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FIGHT BACK IN BRITAIN - FIGHT BACK IN IRAQ

BEAT BACK

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ATTACK

WE SAY

VICTORY

TO IRAQ



Youth revolt against

SCHOOLS OUT AGAINST THE WAR

Youth rebellion against the war has been at the forefront of the global anti-war movement. In country after country school students have walked out of lessons to blockade roads, join protests and to voice their opposition to war.

In Iraq, where US and British bombs are destroying homes and killing civilians every day 42 per cent of the population are aged under 18 years and hundreds of thousands of children have been killed as a result of bombing campaigns and economic sanctions.

This fact is not lost on demonstrators today. As one said: "If people of our age are old enough to be bombed and killed in Iraq, then we are old enough to leave school to protest over here."

The lie that young people are apathetic and not interested in politics has been nailed. Internationally co-ordinated school strikes around the world on 5 March saw tens of thousands taking part. In London school children as young as 11 broke free from police barricades in Parliament Square to

take their protests directly to the gates of Downing Street, closing down Whitehall for most of the afternoon.

Day X, the day after war broke out, again brought thousands on to the streets across the world. Youth to Stop the War and the youth group Revolution participated in protests around Britain and further afield, from Melbourne to Manchester.

In Stockholm 6,000 students walked out of classes, joining other protesters marching on the US embassy. In Berlin 60,000 students, mostly of school age, filled the main square, Alexanderplatz. Revolution flags and literature were eagerly snapped up by youth radicalised by the protests and hungry to discuss.

Britain saw protests in towns and cities across the country. In Birmingham students at the university wrapped themselves in fake bloody bandages to stage a die-in to the tune of a lone saxophonist playing Amazing Grace. This was followed by a banner drop off the University's historic clock tower before demonstrators descended on the city



centre where a sit-down protest blocked traffic. An army vehicle caught up by the protests was plastered in anti-war stickers leaving the soldiers inside in no doubt what the public think of this bloody war.

In Portsmouth, a naval town where anti-war protests are usually frowned upon, 250 university students walked out of lectures and joined a thousand people on the streets where police had to stop them marching on the military dockyard. Nevertheless the biggest protest of any kind the town has seen since 1979 managed to bring parts of the town centre to a standstill.

In Leeds Workers Power and Revolution joined a demonstration that included the local Labour Party HQ as one of its targets. When police prevented the demonstrators marching down some streets young schoolgirls started yelling, "police support the bombing" and "police off our streets." A Revolution member was cheered for making a speech in defence of Iraq and calling for the US to be kicked out of the Middle East.

YOUTH TO STOP THE WAR



A few days after the first school strikes a meeting to set up Youth to Stop the War was attended by over 100 young people discussing how to spread the rebellion and fight victimisation in the schools from hostile teachers. It also considered how to build and strengthen links with young workers and university students.

The meeting debated the politics behind the war and heard a range of speakers from the Stop the War Coalition, War on Want and from Revolution explaining the role of capitalism in creating wars and linking the war on Iraq to the global war on the world's poor in places such as Colombia.

In that country US-backed, right-wing death squads kill hundreds of

trade union and peasant activists who resist the government's privatisation and drug eradication programmes, or who fight against the ruination of their communities by big oil multinationals.

The meeting broke up into regional workshops to plan action around further school and college strikes and to discuss building support among young workers and unemployed youth. The meeting also agreed to affiliate to the Stop the War Coalition.

To many of the young people getting involved this is the first political action of any kind they have taken. The anti-war movement must ensure that these protests are maintained now that the war is underway and that resources are provided to enable the actions to be

spread to places they have not yet reached.

To enable this Workers Power have proposed to the Stop the War Coalition that the school students and student stop the war are bought together with initiatives like Youth to Stop the War to create a single huge youth anti-war movement. Resources of university students should be made available to school students and the experience of various activists can be shared to build a stronger movement. And young workers and unemployed youth can be brought in to such a movement.

The youth rebellion has inspired the anti-war movement and can act as a detonator for organised working class action to match that taken by the school students.

TEACHERS STRIKE AGAINST THE WAR

At St Paul's Way School in Tower Hamlets, East London, the start of the war was marked by a magnificent display of opposition and protest.

National Union of Teachers' members took unofficial strike action on the Thursday the invasion was launched and over 500 students, despite attempts to stop them by members of senior management, stormed out of the school to join the protest.

The NUT group was clear that a strike was needed to express our opposition to imperialist barbarism and activists had worked hard to ensure the success of the action: a letter was written to parents encouraging them to join us on the demonstration, contacts were established on local estates and the school had been awash with anti-war posters, leaflets and badges for weeks.

On the day itself teachers and students marched behind the union banner. One particularly inspirational moment occurred just outside the school, when the teachers and students from St. Paul's Way, met striking lecturers and students from Tower Hamlets College. To great cheers the two marches fused and set off together in a mighty column of anti-imperialist protest.

The protests at St. Paul's Way linked up with a vibrant and militant demonstration



of several thousand, mostly school students, across Tower Hamlets. A plan for the demonstration to rally in Mile End Park was swept aside as marchers spontaneously decided to link up with other demonstrators rallying in Altab Ali Park.

A substantial part of the demonstration then marched into central London to join protests in Parliament Square.

The school students who protested on the 20th were inspiring: angry and determined to express their opposition to the war. What was missing from the protest was workers' strike action on a big enough scale. St Paul's Way was the only NUT group on strike that day in Tower Hamlets. Building strike action against the war will be the key task over the coming weeks.

Organise against the war

The leadership of Britain's labour movement should be ashamed of itself. It has turned its back on the future generation of trade unionists – the school students who have struck against the war – by refusing to sanction a single meaningful protest action against the bloodbath.

It has turned its back on the rank and file trade unionists who organised strike action on the day the war started by calling on every trade unionist to line up dutifully behind the slaughter of Iraqi civilians, the illegal invasion of Iraq and the imperial quest for plunder that lies at the heart of this war. When the war started the TUC issued a statement regretting the war but insisting: "British armed forces and their families, and other staff involved in the military action, including those involved in civilian roles, will expect and must receive the support of the British people."

Must receive? Is this a threat to the trade unionists and children who went on strike? A threat to the anti-war movement? Who does the jumped-up office boy, the new TUC leader Brendan Barber, think he is?

But the statement does show that the People's Assembly's call on the TUC to organise action is only useful as a means of exposing their cowardice. It is not a means of organising action.

That is why we need to pile the pressure onto the anti-war union leaders, like Paul Mackney of Natfhe and Bob Crow of the RMT and Mick Rix of Aslef, to make a clear and unambiguous call to strike against the war. These men have called for strikes. But they have also insisted that their unions cannot call them. The TUC, said Mackney, on 22 March, should be organising strike action. But it isn't – and at this stage it won't.

That is why it is vital for the anti-war union leaders to act like leaders. It is excellent that Bob Crow has refused to suspend the class struggle at home and has pulled strikes of guards that have already crippled the rail network for two days. But these are not strikes against the war.

Left leaders like Crow, who have been outspoken in their opposition to the war drive, must now say: our unions will support strikes against the war and agitate for

the war

MANCHESTER

On 19 March thousands of school students walked out on strike and rallied in Manchester's Albert Square, often defying the condemnation of local teachers, before setting off on an unscheduled march/blockade of town which lasted for four hours!

The cops were completely unprepared for the scale and determination of the protesters. At every junction they threw up horses or a pathetically inadequate line of police which the crowd simply charged through, pushed out of the way or walked around.

Eventually the police called out the Tactical Aid Unit (TAU - in fact assault unit) of specially trained thugs who brought the crowd to a halt outside the BBC offices on Oxford Road. After blocking all traffic for half an hour the whole march regrouped and surged back into town, again defying the police, blocking buses and cars, putting Stop the War posters on the front of buses.

By now the humiliation of the police was complete and they began to assault and charge the crowd, horses stamping on kids, officers pushing children to the floor. Before finally trapping the crowd on the edge of Albert Square where the TAU attacked the

crowd, breaking one student's hand, macing him, pushing a woman student to the ground and kicking her in the head, using batons and horses to charge the protesters.

They finally read the riot act to the crowd demanding we disperse or risk arrest. The Chief Superintendent of Manchester Police later commented that the school kids "were putting their lives in danger" by attending the demo. He wasn't joking.

The next day - day X - a student protest at 1pm of around a thousand again turned into an impromptu march through town. At 5pm about 1,500 people rallied in the city centre demanding we blockade the town again. The crowd took up the chant: "Blockade now! Blockade now!" and surged away down Market Street. Revo and Workers Power comrades were right at the front as the demo literally ran through police lines, charging down the street and picking up thousands more protesters on the way. Again the police attempted to block us at every junction, but this time we weren't taking no ****. We repeatedly forced our way through every obstruction until, after occupying Oxford Street, we marched back into Albert Square and on around town once again.

SPAIN

The biggest youth opposition to war so far has been seen in Spain. On 26 March one million students from schools and universities demonstrated in over 70 towns and cities, the turnout from the universities was put at over 90 per cent with the biggest demonstrations being held in Madrid where 250,000 marched and Barcelona where over 150,000 turned out. The students' union which organised the demonstrations and workers around Spain are now calling on the main trade unions, the CCOO and UGT to join the CGT in calling for a general strike to bring Spain to a standstill to stop the imperialist war and to bring down the pro-war Aznar government.

The statement issued by the National Executive of the Sindicato de Estudiantes (Students Union) in Madrid following the demonstrations ends: "February 15th demonstrated how it is possible to coordinate the struggle on an international level. Who can doubt that an international general strike, called in Spain by the CCOO and the UGT, in Italy by the CGIL, in Britain by the TUC and in the United States by the AFL-CIO, could not stop this war? A massive mobilisation of the workers and youth is the way to stop imperialism."

As one Birmingham 14-year-old school girl said of the school walk-outs to the trade unionists at the London People's Assembly on 12 March: "We did it, so can you!"

- and the TUC leaders

them. And they need to call on other unions to strike too.

Their excuse for not doing this is that the anti-union laws will be used against them. This is a sad response from people who are supposed to be the awkward squad. For a start the war is illegal - but it hasn't stopped Blair launching it. That alone justifies our side breaking an anti-working class set of laws. More importantly, the anti-union laws can only be used if we bow down before them.

If the PCS, Natfhe, the RMT, the CWU, the NUI, Aslef and the FBU all agreed to strike together, even just for one day, against the war it would throw the government and bosses into complete panic. Sections of the other unions, like Unison, which has many anti-war branches, would soon join the fray. If Blair tried to use the anti-union laws to hammer these unions, and these unions stuck together, the laws wouldn't last a week. The government would be fighting, and losing, two wars on two fronts.

The only way we can get the lefts to take such a course of action is by organising the

rank and file into a powerful movement that can force their hands, as in Italy where pressure from below forced the leadership of the CGIL federation to back a two-hour, general strike at the start of the war.

The strikes led by rank and file activists in the schools and colleges and in the PCS (with the backing of its leader Mark Serwotka), were successes. So far not one striker has been charged under the anti-union laws. But getting such action in the future, and extending it, needs official backing. Such backing - with a huge anti-war and pro-strike action propaganda campaign preceding it in every workplace - can win over many waverers, strengthen the hand of the militants and deliver the goods.

And those "goods" - strikes, blacking, protests in the workplace - are the most effective means of paralysing both the government's and the bosses' functioning and their political will.

The time for rhetoric by the union leaders has passed. The rank and file must organise to demand and organise action now.

Why we back Iraq

The Iraqi armed forces and civilians are putting up far more effective resistance to the Anglo-American invasion than Washington and London thought possible.

Inflated with imperialist arrogance, they boasted the regime would collapse in a few days, unable to resist the massive force and technological sophistication of the invading armies.

For days they tried to suggest that Iraqi commanders and their men would desert, even change sides en masse. The grateful Shi'ites of southern Iraq would be showering rose petals on the US marines and British commandos as they marched in.

This scenario ignored a basic fact of life under capitalism. No people wants to see its country invaded, its natural resources seized, its rulers replaced by foreign armies, no matter how unpopular its own government may be.

Instead of "three days to Baghdad" British troops got horribly bogged down in Umm Qasr, taking over a week to capture the key port. The "Desert Rats" had to beat a hasty retreat on their first attempt to enter Basra. US reports of an uprising there turned out to be disinformation.

Nasariyah, a key crossing point on the Euphrates, has seen a week of fierce resistance slowing the US tank advance on Baghdad. The civilian populations of Basra and Baghdad appear so far to be neither shocked nor awed by the day and night bombardments.

The first Iraqi crowd to receive the food and water aid from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent spoilt the photo-opportunity, by breaking into chants of "Saddam good! Bush bad!", according to the BBC World Service.

The USA has total air dominance and can attack the movements of any substantial armoured forces, yet small groups of lightly armed infantry have harassed American convoys and the 350 mile over-extended communications lines. Bad weather - sandstorms and heavy rain - plus supply shortages slowed and even halted the US advance on Baghdad.

The war that was supposed to be over within two weeks is now being declared to be a long haul, maybe even lasting for months. Over 100,000 more troops are being summoned from the USA.

Even the Coalition of the Killing is showing signs of strain. Bush and Blair have announced differing visions for a post-Saddam Iraq. Tony Blair talks of a major role for the UN in the interim government. The British desperately need to cloak their unprovoked aggression as "liberation" and the plunder of Iraq's natural wealth as "humanitarian aid" or "food for oil".

Bush and Donald Rumsfeld do not want the United Nations in Iraq except as a glorified aid agency. They want General Franks as gauleiter of Baghdad and another retired US general as civilian administrator. They don't give a fig about the views of the "international community". They just want to liberate Iraq from its people.

They are already "liberating" Iraqi property held outside Iraq from its rightful owners. They demand that foreign governments hand over Iraqi property held in their banking systems on pain of exclusion from the international dollar exchange system.

But their brazen colonialism has one advantage over Blair's spin - it is brutally frank and so fools no one. Blair is a nauseating hypocrite. His real purpose is to get a cut of the USA world empire.

Sensing his weakness Blair increasingly appeals to the people to "support our boys". He even lies openly about British soldiers being executed in order to get the population onside.

Yet who put them "in harm's way"? Bush and Blair. This whole filthy project is certainly not worth the lives of the dozens of US and British soldiers who have died so far, let alone those of the hundreds of Iraqi civilians and the unknown numbers of Iraqi soldiers.

The best "support" we can give to British soldiers and their families is to fight here to get them out of Iraq immediately. Their death, maiming, lifelong health breakdown are a futile waste. The killing of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians is even worse. It is a monstrous war crime.

The Iraqis, no matter who their leaders are, have every right to defend their homeland. If there is a war where one side is justifiably defending themselves and the other wrongfully attacking them then it is the duty of every democrat, let alone every revolutionary socialist, to take sides with those repelling the invaders.

There are those within the anti-war movement who say: "yes we agree but it is not tactically wise to say so". But any determined patriot can spot this evasion. They will ask us: who do you want to win? They will pose the dilemma: "What if your anti-war opposition means 'we' lose?" What use is an evasive or nonsensical answer: neither side? both sides? just stop fighting?

No, the only consistent answer - leaving aside the position of an absolute pacifist - is to say "yes, we want to see this invasion defeated: we do not want to see Iraq occupied."

That is why we side with Iraq and why we must do everything we can to help their forces defeat the US/UK aggression. How can they do it? By any means necessary: guerrilla attacks, deceptive suicide bombs, taking help from foreign volunteers, arms smuggled from Syria. Above all the regime must arm the population.

How can we help? By continuing and extending the battle on the home front against Bush and Blair, Howard, Aznar and Berlusconi on the streets of Europe, Australia, the USA, above all with mass strike action to halt their war and drive them from office.

The Roman Empire fell - the British Empire fell - the American Empire too will fall. Speed the day! Victory to Iraq!

24-hour rolling rubbish

With very few exceptions the media's coverage of the war on Iraq has been a disgrace, writes *Keith Harvey*. Why do they lie?

Tony Blair announced that Luke Allsop, a young British soldier, was executed by the Iraqis. According to Luke's colonel and sister, Blair was lying through his teeth. Yet the result of this "story" was that, for a few hours, support for the attack on Iraq was stoked up.

It is typical of the fog of deception that the war machine spews out during conflicts. Public opinion is a valuable asset for Bush and Blair. And they will stop at nothing to shape it to suit their needs. So, when reporters in Baghdad reveal the deaths of civilians when a market place is bombed by the US, the reporters back home dutifully tell us that the Americans "are still convinced" the bomb was dropped by the Iraqis themselves.

Even the language changes. The US and UK invaders have suddenly become "Coalition" forces. What coalition? Reports from Iraq are made by people "whose movements are restricted and whose reports are monitored". What about journalists with the invaders - are they allowed to roam free and say what they want? Of course not.

What we are faced with, from the bulk of the British media, is a propaganda machine. The Pentagon and Ministry of Defence want to ensure positive reporting of their war aims and the course of the battle:

- The Iraqis are greeting the US and UK soldiers as liberators.
- The coalition forces are determined to minimise civilian casualties.
- They are doing everything they can to rush humanitarian aid to the "liberated" towns.
- No matter what happens "we" are always winning.

These messages are essential to win political support for the war back home and to keep up the spirits of the US/UK troops. And



Breaking News... Another made up story and more propaganda

Press here

to get them across the media must be tightly controlled.

During the last Gulf War the book of rules issued to British journalists in 1991 included the instruction that "no pictures of casualties" among the allied forces can be shown. And the military personnel briefing journalists were always one step ahead of the journalists themselves in terms of knowing what was going on.

This meant that the media loyally followed the script. Roy Greenslade, who was the editor of the *Daily Mirror* at the time, admitted that as a result:

"Only afterwards did people discover that Iraq's 'battle-hardened army' was not only nothing like as strong as the press had repeatedly suggested, it was pathetically weak. Journalists had accepted the word of official briefers, just as they did on almost every matter in the lead-up to war. They appeared unable or unwilling to challenge what they were told."

Confessing his own "culpability and complicity", Greenslade wrote in 1997:

"I can see now that our coverage in the *Mirror* was built on a lot of anti-Iraqi bias, an anti-Muslim bias and an anti-Arab bias."

So is it any different this time?

In 1991 only CNN covered the Gulf War through satellite broadcasts with rolling news 24/7. Relatively few people had access

to it. Today there are many competing services. So this time round the Pentagon devised a new strategy - the "embedding" of journalists in the fighting units themselves. There are about 900 UK and US "embeds" in the Gulf today.

They are not allowed to reveal precise locations and military plans and their dependent position and hunger for getting the "news" first means they are constantly manipulated by the military.

With only a fragmentary picture of the fighting with individual units, the embedded journalists have no way of reporting on the general situation and remain totally dependent on briefings from command headquarters for an overall account of "progress" with the invasion. A rumour or a bit of disinformation can turn setbacks into stories of how everything is going according to plan.

For example, two days into the invasion the military briefings from US central command reported that the port of Umm Qasr was secured and in their hands. This was to show that "resistance" was futile and the regime would collapse quickly. The press and TV networks faithfully reported all this. But it soon became clear that this was not true and it took two more days to break the resistance in the town.

This has been even more the case with

the battles around and for control of Nasiriyah. The world has been told on at least three occasions that the "coalition" had secured control of it. Yet after one week fierce fighting was still being reported and an Iraqi counter-offensive was launched.

The reports of the Basra "uprising" on the fifth day are another examples of the distortion we are being subjected to. Desperate for news, we were told it was "inevitable" that such popular mobilisations against the regime would happen. The media were primed and ran with it, ignoring from outset the refutation from the Arab TV station al-Jazeera whose reporters were the only independent media actually in the city.

Only gradually was it accepted that what had taken place was a small street protest in the south-eastern outskirts of the city when a local Ba'athist headquarters was hit by US artillery.

But spreading the story of the uprising by the US and UK invaders was a crucial ploy to legitimise the idea that this is a war of "liberation". Talking it up would, the military hoped, encourage others to abandon the defence of their country and welcome the invaders.

How they manipulate 'public opinion'

Most people in this country were against the war before it started. Yet of the national daily papers the pro-war titles had a readership of nearly 10 million while those against the war about 3 million.

Once the war started the three UK "anti-war" national dailies - The Guardian, Independent and the Daily Mirror - shamefully decided to get behind "our boys", boosting Blair and support for the war in the polls, mainly by making up the minds of the roughly 30 per cent of the population that were undecided before the war started.

Reports of the anti-war movement, its mass actions and mass support faded from view, with BBC bosses claiming that it no longer represented a significant strand of opinion.

Within 24 hours of the "failure of diplomacy" the media switched its emphasis immediately; politics gave way to reports from embedded journalists on front line

preparations. Stories of the pain of being separated from "loved ones" back home, the difficult weather conditions they were suffering from started to pour in. Viewers are drawn in to identifying not just with the soldier but with the project their masters have ordered them to prosecute.

Another method of doing this is the reporting of coalition casualties. All the media, without exception, have faithfully reported the Bush/Blair line that all coalition forces soldiers - even those killed by "friendly fire" - were "brave".

But getting killed by a stray US Patriot missile while returning to base hardly constitutes being brave.

The really "brave" soldiers are the Iraqis. Outgunned, with no air support, subject to massive bombardment on their lines, often engaging tanks with small arm fire, these are actions of brave people.

Yet the relentless portrayal of

them as "Saddam's thugs" while our boys are brave is all designed to make us identify with the war aims of Bush and Blair.

In the USA it is even worse. Some TV network news reporting has abandoned any pretence at "objectivity" and signed up for the war aims. Lead morning anchor man for CNN on 26 March - after showing footage of Bush arriving at an airforce base - gushed:

"If that rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner doesn't stir you, I don't know what will".

Fox News studio is completely bedecked in the US flag. When "bad news" is reported the anchor man rushes to press everyone to "focus on the positive". All the networks run competitions that invite viewers to poke fun at Arabic names.

The result - racism, hatred, support for the killing and the complete censorship of the anti-war message being pushed by millions of us.

Defend Al Jazeera

The Arab satellite TV network al-Jazeera, based in Qatar, is a thorn in the side of the US/UK propaganda machine.

Up and running since 1996 it has 35 million subscribers in the Arab-speaking world and had four million new subscribers in Europe during March. It was the only rolling news service to report from inside Kabul when the US attacked it in 2001.

Now it has been heavily criticised by Bush and Blair for broadcasting Iraqi footage of five US prisoners of war and at least eight corpses.

"Television networks that carry such pictures, I would say, are doing something that is unfortunate," U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told CNN.

"I regard the showing of those pictures as absolutely unacceptable," U.S. Army Lt. Gen. John Abizaid told a Central Command press briefing in Qatar. "I would say the pictures were disgusting."

In the same briefing one US reporter invited Abizaid to declare

Straightforward censorship by the military does exist. For example, the military authorities have introduced rules to prevent the TV channels witnessing the return of dead soldiers. The only time coffins are allowed to be shown will be "when they are buried with full military honours in the US." In short, the sight of body bags would demoralise the public whereas the stars and stripes, bugles and patriotic ceremonials will unite the nation.

But in Britain and the US the governments mainly rely on self-censorship by their friends in the media. The so-called military experts have all been vetted by the defence ministries, many of them are ex-officers. Some so-called independent experts are often consultants providing advice for the military planners themselves.

The managers of the media can be relied upon to crack down on those who rock the boat, as when a senior journalist in the Arabic news service for the BBC World Service was sacked for going on the London anti-war demonstration on 15 February; or when all BBC correspondents were warned not to attend the 15 February demonstration.

Sometimes the self-censorship comes after political pressure is put on them. British Defence Minister Geoff Hoon asked the TV networks not to show pictures of captured British soldiers. The BBC was forced to promise that it would no longer show footage of seriously injured British troops, after the mother of a Royal Marine watched her son, on a BBC early evening bulletin, set on fire during a gun battle.

Sometimes self-censorship comes because the editors decide that an alternative message to the predominant pro-war one will seriously dent the "battle for hearts and minds". For example, the six main TV network channels refused to show a Jon Alpert documentary made in the weeks before the invasion that depicted seven US high school students talking to seven Iraqi students about "ordinary teenage stuff".

But whatever methods they use, one thing is clear. The war on the media front is vital to the warmongers. And if they can't entirely stop the truth getting out they will always do their best to twist it to suit their own goals.

that al-Jazeera was "hostile media" - no doubt opening it up to be attacked or removed.

The Pentagon and Ministry of Defence hate the channel because it is not under their control, because it shows us the real brutality of the war and because its reporters enjoy a unique freedom of movement inside the main Iraqi cities. As a result it is coming under attack. Its new English language website was launched on 24 March but was quickly hit by hacker attacks - as was the Arabic-language site (www.aljazeera.net).

Al-Jazeera editors have made it clear they suspect the Pentagon is behind it. In addition the US server that hosted the site - Datapipe - has cancelled the contract under political pressure.

On 25 March, less than a week into the invasion the New York Stock Exchange banned its reporters from the trading floor in retaliation for the channel's war coverage. Al-Jazeera plans an English language version of its satellite channel. When it goes live all who can should sign up to it.

On 12 March, the People's Assembly gathered at Central Hall Westminster. Some 1,500 delegates from trade unions, political parties, CND, the Muslim Association of Britain and local Stop The War groups met to discuss how to take the anti-war movement forward.

A highpoint was the greetings given by several delegations of young school students who had walked out of classes in previous days. They lit up the hall with their energy and courage.

The People's Assembly was a great opportunity to hammer out a strategy for obstructing the imperial war effort. Unfortunately, this did not occur. Instead its organisers in the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) satisfied themselves with a grand rally. There were fiery speeches from the "big names" of the movement including Labour MPs, George Galloway, Alice Mahon, Jeremy Corbyn, Alan Simpson and John McDonnell.

Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT, said: "We've got to pile the pressure on. If Tony Blair is going to take illegal action then we should also take illegal action in the form of civil disobedience. We need non-violent demonstrations. If that means sitting on motorways stopping the traffic, sitting in the streets, occupying our factories, then so be it."

He stated that the RMT would defend its members who took industrial action, if they were prosecuted under the anti-union laws. But he added, in parenthesis: "I'm not saying I can call a strike."

The meeting did resolve that: "The day that war breaks out, the assembly calls on everyone to STOP EVERYTHING. Where possible walk out of your work place, college or school and then converge in your city centre."

Further it called for a national demonstration in London on the first Saturday after war is declared and in any case on 22 March.

But this was no more than had been agreed in Florence at the ESF in November: no more than two million people in Hyde Park on February 15 had pledged themselves to do.

To make sure Britain stopped on the day after war started it was essential that the workers in public transport, factories, offices and shops were organised to take strike action, leading if possible to an indefinite general strike.

But the dominant forces running the show – the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of Britain – did not even dare to put this forward for debate. Worse they did everything in their power to make sure no one else did.

A motion adopted by the Assembly with no opposition, and proposed by the Workers Revolutionary Party, stated that: "The trade union movement has the power to stop British intervention against Iraq. We therefore demand that a recall Congress of the TUC be immediately organised to call a general strike action against Blair's support for the US illegally planned attack on Iraq."

Calls on the TUC and general secretaries to take industrial action up to and including a general strike may expose their inaction to their members but they are totally insufficient to bring about mass strike action. This is true especially after the TUC General Council, in mid-February, rejected a call by seven unions for a special conference to plan action against the war.

That is why the People's Assembly itself should have sent out a call on all the national unions, to all local union branches, district committees and to the millions of rank and file union members to take immediate action, building towards a general strike.

It should have asked Bob Crow, Mick Rix and others if they were prepared to fight for all-out strike action in their own and in other unions.

The Assembly should have devoted most of its agenda to discussing the real obstacles which exist to getting mass strike action and the forms of organisation and political agitation that we need to overcome them. This it totally failed to do.

Andrew Murray is national chair of the StWC and a leading member of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB). The CPB still has a major following in the union bureau-

The People's Assembly - a missed opportunity

Dave Stockton reports on the first People's Assembly



cracy and in CND. Through them it exerts a powerful influence on the Coalition.

In a recent document Murray indicates his and his party's objectives for StWC. It is to develop it in the direction of a popular front - i.e. an alliance with the parties of the "patriotic" bourgeoisie, those who are part of the "democratic consensus of the whole nation". He applauds the fact that StWC "reaches out into the Liberal Democrats in a serious way, and even into the ranks of conservatives. (...) It is just about as broad as the country itself."

What use these Liberals and Conservatives are to stopping the war and defeating imperialist occupation and plunder of Iraq is not stated. And when it comes to tactics

it is clear that the policy for People's Assembly originated with the CPB:

"Walk-outs in the workplace are absolutely critical. We understand that the trade unions cannot call for such action themselves because of the anti-union laws. But we must organise to make it happen anyway. We should follow the lead of the inspiring school students walk-out on Wednesday. Can trade unionists do less?"

This was also the theme taken up by Socialist Workers Party (SWP) speakers like John Rees and Chris Bambery – follow the lead of the school students. Don't ask anything specific of the union leaders. Maybe the example of the youth will inspire trade union members to take action.

But gambling on the potential effect of the war, of mass demonstrations, of the moral effect of the school strikes is not a strategy.

If you really believe that Britain must be made ungovernable and Blair brought down, as the StWC leaders say, then you must concentrate on getting the working class to stop production and cripple the bosses' profits and the government's normal functioning. The factories, shops, offices, trains and government departments must be brought to a stop. We do not say this is easy. Certainly it will not happen spontaneously. It has to be fought for – with a strategy not a pious hope that everyone will just do the same as the school students did.

Workers Power resolution to the Assembly

"This People's Assembly declares an all-out struggle against the unjust war being prepared against Iraq.

We proclaim that this war will not be waged in the name of the people of this country and we pledge ourselves to do everything in our power to prevent it or halt it.

This Assembly calls for the immediate formation of people's assemblies against the war in every city, borough and town throughout the country.

It calls for the election of accountable delegates to these bodies from trades councils, trade union branches and district committees, local anti-war committees, local organisations of the black, Asian and immigrant communities, schools, colleges, women's and youth organisations, political parties fighting the war including local Labour parties.

The purpose of these people's assemblies is to mobilise in every town and city for mass direct action against the war, including strike action by workers, school and students, for traffic blockades, demonstrations, pickets of MPs surgeries or Labour Party meetings, obstruction of the movement of military supplies, blockades of air bases or ports and other forms of protest.

The people's assemblies must act as the base for mass strike action up to and including a GENERAL STRIKE and a mass popular uprising of protest.

To this end this people's assembly calls on all trade union leaders to organise industrial action to stop the war effort and protest against the war. We call on all MPs to force a vote and vote against the war or - if no vote is allowed - to disrupt the normal workings of parliament as part of the campaign to stop the war.

Our aim is to either force the abandonment of the present mobilisation for war and the withdrawal of British troops, or to bring a halt to the war if it is launched.

This Assembly endorses the call issued by the European Social Forum for mass strike action and civil disobedience immediately any war begins and will endeavour to link up with other anti-war movements across the globe. In the meantime it appeals to trade unions to organise a national day of strike action on March 21, when European unions will be taking action.

To these ends this Assembly elects an executive committee of x members, charged to forward the above process of forming people's assemblies across the country and to recall the People's Assembly on 22 March, ensuring it is made up of delegates of local people's assemblies and national trade unions and other antiwar organisations". About 40 per cent of delegates voted for this.

In summary the assembly was long rhetorical pledges to take action, and union leaders promised to "support the members" if they took it, but short on what could be done to bring this about.

Is this what democracy looks like?

No general resolution on strategy presented to the Assembly which spelled out the actions and forms of organisation needed, except for the one submitted by Workers Power.

The SWP – by far the most powerful party represented – submitted nothing. Worse than that the StWC officers carried out an undemocratic manoeuvre to stop the Workers Power resolution, which during the course of the meeting won support from militants in the RMT, from even being discussed by the Assembly.

The chair had agreed it would be debated in the penultimate session. But it took a vigorous intervention by Workers Power delegates with the steering committee to get it back onto the agenda, despite the fact that it had been sent in before the Assembly met and that resolutions tabled by others were taken.

During the lunch break, the StWC national officer and SWP leading member Lindsey German interrupted Workers Power members distributing the resolution in the hall. She ordered her hacks to try and deflect them all in!

Clearly delegates were not going to be allowed to make an informed judgement on the resolution, and clearly some "people" are more equal than others. When it finally came to the session on practical action Andrew Murray, chair for much of the Assembly, announced that "due to lack of time" it was impossible to discuss our resolution. It would have to be referred to the StWC steering committee.

Nevertheless, Workers Power delegates managed to put one key proposal (a call for delegate-based people's assemblies in every city and town) as an amendment to a resolution that Murray did not touch on recalling the People's Assembly. Delegates were able to argue that without local organising centres for action, mass strike action would be difficult if not impossible to organise.

Despite opposition from the platform and the SWP delegation voting against it, about 40 per cent of the delegates voted for the amendment. The SWP joined the CPB allies in determinedly blocking the adoption of delegate-based mobilising centres that could deliver anything approaching a general strike. This could well prove fatal to any hopes of mass strike action.

The weeks since the Assembly – those filled with brave and admirable demonstrations and blockades – have failed to produce any sizeable or sustained industrial action. The SWP demagogically coined "action" to an attempt to build a movement rooted in the existing mass trade unions campaigns. Why? Partly because of its spontaneism – leaving developments to the spontaneous course of events. But also because of its view of the role of the party.

The SWP always wants to keep a tight grip on any united front. Not by the party of their ideas debated out in public, but by an organisational stranglehold. They tightly control the StWC campaign through full time officers. Their attitude is brooding "if we can't control it we will stop it".

The fact is that the present StWC structures alone cannot deliver a general strike or probably even mass involvement by organised workers. The SWP now leads this to spontaneous militancy and the graces of the left trade union bureaucracy. It will not politically lead a mass movement itself but will hand the reins to the reformist bureaucracy when the chips are really down.

Whereas it tries to stop revolutionary change by offering an alternative strategy by a trick in the book. That is why the SWP is not the revolutionary party they claim to be but a force that vacillates between revolutionary and reformist politics – in short what Marxists have long described as traitors.

The project for a ne

The war aims of the United States have nothing to do with getting rid of weapons of mass destruction or getting rid of Saddam Hussein because he is a tyrant and has links with al-Qaida. Mark Hoskisson looks at how Bush's plans for world domination took shape before 9/11 and became a programme of imperialist action after it

The 20th century saw the USA become the most powerful imperialist power in the world. According to myth the leaders of the land of the free carried the banner of freedom to Latin America, the Middle East and Asia and in two world wars rescued Europe from tyranny. After 1945 it assumed the position of sentry at the gates of democracy – eyeballing the red devils of communism across the iron curtain in Eastern Europe and carpet bombing them in the jungles and paddie fields of South East Asia. And, despite setbacks like Vietnam, freedom eventually triumphed when the “evil empire”, as President Ronald Reagan dubbed the Soviet Union, came crashing down at the end of the Cold War. This version of history really is bunk. There was never anything benign about the advance of US imperialism. Its wars were wars of conquest. Its victories paved the way for the dollar to dominate the globe. While some of the governments it installed – either via invasions or CIA-led coups – may have been homegrown, they were bought and paid for by Washington. The vassal states of the US Empire became markets for its goods, locations for its investments and cheap sources of raw materials. It was for the good of US corporation United Fruit that the democratically elected government of Guatemala was overthrown in 1953. It was to protect the big US (and UK) oil companies that Iran's government was overthrown by the CIA. To stop the threat of communism spreading Vietnam was subjected to years of brutality at the hands of the Pentagon's military machine. To this day tiny Cuba is blockaded, harassed and part-occupied for the same reason. Up to the end of the 1970s the US Empire recognised that it could not take

on and destroy the Soviet Union. Even its policy of containing it was coming unstuck. The defeats the US, or US-backed regimes, suffered in the 1970s – in Vietnam, Angola, the Horn of Africa and Central America, especially Nicaragua – showed that Washington was far from invincible. Economic crisis and stagnation undermined the USA from within. Abroad, Uncle Sam and his local relatives were being beaten by anti-imperialist movements, armed by the Soviet Union. The USSR, a product of a workers' revolution but long since degenerated

marked for destruction. And it was Ronald Reagan – a direct forerunner of George W Bush – who decided to destroy it. Reagan's goal was simple – take out the evil empire and thereby take out the anti-imperialist movements it backed; that way the US capitalists would gain a huge new chunk of the world to exploit. His methods were robust. US military spending, especially on nuclear weapons aimed at the USSR, must soar. Reactionary movements – like the Contras in Nicaragua and, famously, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida in Afghanistan – must be armed and backed

al superpower – using the new phase of imperialist globalisation to extend the reach of its corporations everywhere. However, under the Democratic president, Bill Clinton, a dispute arose inside the US ruling class over what it should do with its power. The dispute had its origins in the first Gulf War of 1991. In the first Gulf War, George Bush Senior operated strictly within the confines of the institutions of the world order set up after the Second World War, primarily through the United Nations. He did not try to assert US power as a given, regardless of allies. He tried to build an alliance. Clinton, by and large, continued with this policy, even though in 1998 he and Blair attacked Iraq without UN support and did the same in Kosova a year later (though using Nato in that case).

Furthermore, both Bush Senior and Clinton attempted to broker a deal between Israel and the Palestinians as part of the price for having won over Arab states to the alliance in the first Gulf War. Naturally, the proposed deal (and eventual Oslo accords) benefited Israel and betrayed the Palestinians. But even so, there was engagement with the PLO, which many in the upper echelons of the US ruling class regarded as a betrayal in itself. What was the problem? First, the emerging right-wing group around George Bush Junior felt that Bush Senior and Clinton had made a big mistake in ending the 1991 war when they did. After all, Saddam remained in power – and therefore in control over the country with the second largest oil reserves in the world. This meant continued instability in the Gulf, especially as the Islamic Republic of Iran had survived the decades of turmoil and war and still remained hostile to the US. Second, they believed that the partial character of the first Gulf War was a product of the uselessness of the old insti-

The hard right believed that the only way to guarantee that no superpower rival could ever emerge (China was their chief suspect) was if the US operated a forceful, unilateralist, military interventionist foreign policy aimed at smashing opposition, deterring potential rivals and building strong outposts of their empire across the entire globe

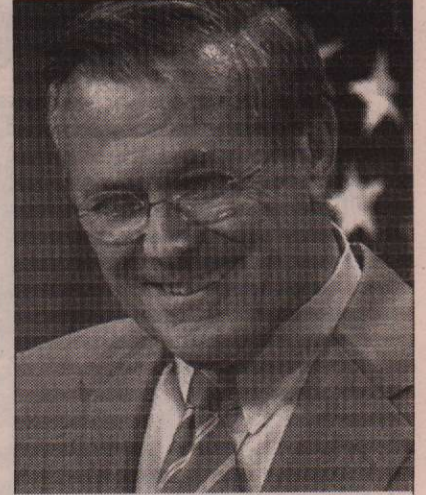
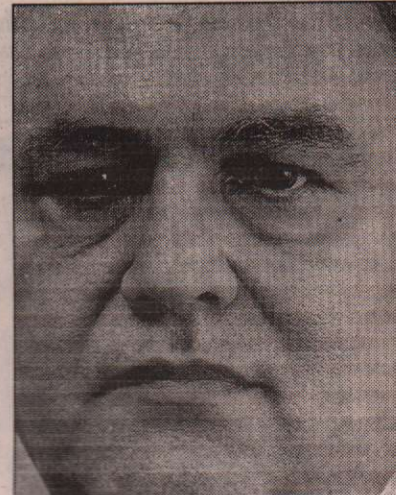
under the rule of a brutal Stalinist dictatorship, was playing its own game of power politics. The bureaucracy's aims were not the liberation of humanity. It backed anti-imperialist movements the better to control them; to strengthen itself and win poker chips so it could stay in the game. The Soviet Union's ill-fated invasion of Afghanistan and the creation of the Islamic Republic in Iran, on the back of a revolution in 1979, marked a watershed. Ronald Reagan was elected the following year and he sharply changed the general direction of US foreign policy. The post-Second World War “bi-polar” order (essentially a balance between two great powers, the US and USSR) was

to the hilt in order to overcome the reverses of the 1970s. And in the Middle East, Israel continued to be backed in its ceaseless war against the Palestinians. The results of this policy, which materialised in the early 1990s after Reagan had left the scene, were successful beyond the imagination of the Washington policy makers. The Soviet Union did indeed collapse, along with most of its satellite states. Anti-imperialist movements, including the PLO, dumped their arms, donned their suits and headed for negotiating tables to discuss the terms of their surrender. China embarked on the road back to capitalism. Above all, the USA became the sole glob-

How Bush's group of right-wing advis

The group that is responsible for launching the war against Iraq is the very same group of right-wingers who sniped at Clinton for his “multilateralism” and advised George W Bush during his campaign to secure the presidency. They are known as the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). The group was set up in 1997 and included Dick Cheney (current vice-president), Donald Rumsfeld (Defence Secretary under Reagan and Bush Junior) and Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Defence Secretary). It also included Jeb Bush (the president's brother and governor of Florida – the state that rigged the election), Richard Perle, an adviser and millionaire known as the “Prince of Darkness” in Washington circles, and the philosopher Robert Kagan. In other words we are not talking about a gang of mavericks. We are talking about the president's inner clique, men with money, influence and clear ideas. These ideas were set out through the late 1990s and early 21st century and are now being implemented at the cost of thousands of lives. Their view of the need for US global domination is straightforward and set out in their statement of principles from June 1997 – spend more on defence, attack

hostile regimes, promote neo-liberal economic policies across the globe, tear up treaties that don't tie in with US needs and: “Having led the West to victory in the Cold War ... we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles. Such a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity may not be fashionable today. But it is necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of the past century and ensure our security and our greatness in the next.” This is refreshingly frank. It asserts that the US will lead and others must follow or be swept aside. The unilateralist line of march was signalled when George W Bush announced, to a chorus of international gasps, that the US was tearing up the Kyoto treaty designed to control fossil emissions. Why should the biggest gas-guzzler be muzzled? The same contempt for international law was shown when the administration made clear it would not support the International Criminal Court and risk having its soldiers tried for war crimes by others. Only Washington is fit to be judge and jury of its own and other peoples. But in order to activate their policy at the military level a pretext was needed. It



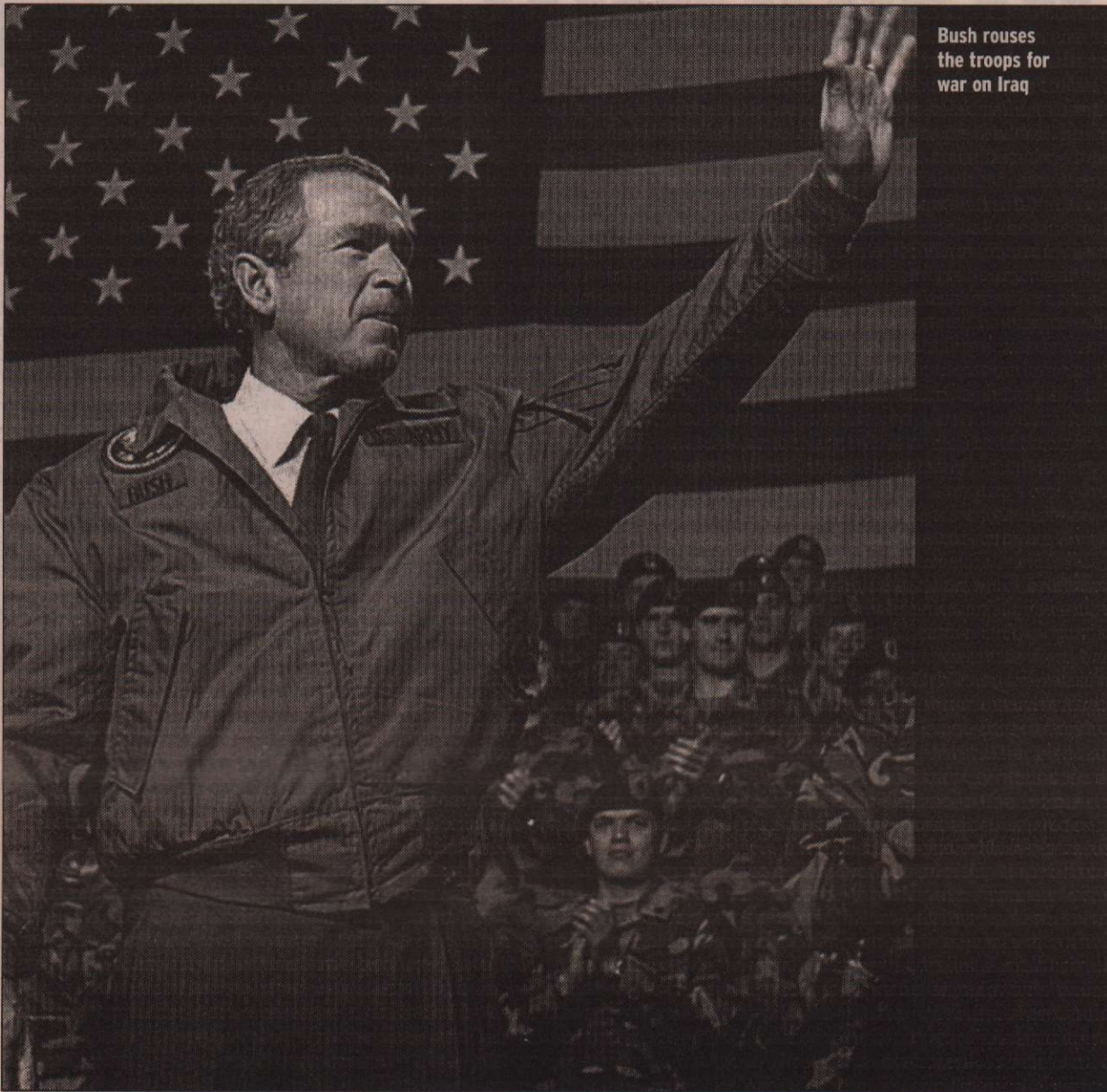
Dick Cheney, Richard Perle and Donald Rumsfeld: part of Bush Junior's inner circle and members of Project for the New American Century

came in the shape of “the war on terrorism” launched by Bush after 9/11. Afghanistan was selected as the first target because Bin Laden lived there. But it was earmarked as a target before the attack on the twin towers. In a *New York Times* article in March 2001, a good few months before 9/11, PNAC writer Marc Gerecht argued that the US should begin arming and aiding one of the Taliban's key opponents, Ahmed Shah Massoud, because

“...it is not too late for the United States to play hardball. The Bush administration could give a small slice of the multi-billion-dollar counter-terrorist budget to Mr Massoud. That might bring Mullah Omar down to earth.” As it turned out the US did considerably more than aid the Northern Alliance against the Taliban. It did what the PNAC had long wanted – it took out what it considered to be a hostile regime. No argu-

ment, no messing, just bomb it to oblivion and overthrow the government. The 9/11 attack gave it the pretext to do something right out in the open that it had frequently done only on the quiet in the past. Attack, destroy and install a puppet regime, “friendly” to US interests. The success of this attack spurred the Bush gang on. They argued that the war on terror was not a war on terrorists but on countries that had “weapons of mass

w American Empire



Bush rouses the troops for war on Iraq

tutions of "world governance", in the first place, the UN. The UN was, essentially, a tool of US foreign policy in a world when it was obliged to take notice of a rival superpower. With such a rival long gone the US needed to act alone, in its own interests, if it was to fully realise its potential as the sole superpower.

The UN, the right-wingers argued, was a fetter on the fight for US global dominance and, since the US effectively ran it, it could be discarded at little cost. But the US could only do this if it went back to Reagan levels of defence spending, building up a military capability that could make any challengers to the US cower. Clinton was labelled as a traitor to US interests for cutting defence spending sharply as he sought to eliminate the federal budget deficits built up under Reagan.

Moreover, despite his willingness to act in Kosova, at a time when the major powers in Europe proved themselves incapable of intervening, Clinton's refusal to go much beyond an air war was viewed as a willingness to tolerate rogue elements such as Milosevic. For the right wing, such tolerance was little more than appeasement. Europe had proved itself feeble, they argued, now it was time for the US to assert its power, even in Europe's own "backyard".

Third, the right wingers, all Christian fundamentalists or influenced by Christian fundamentalism, perceived a danger to US global interests in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The surrender by Stalinist influenced national liberation movements in the 1990s was accompanied by the growth of Islamic fundamentalist groups like Hamas in Palestine and of course al-Qaida (which had turned on the US after it moved its forces into Saudi Arabia on the eve of the first Gulf War).

These groups were clearly anti-American, as the bomb attack on the World

Trade Centre in 1993 proved. And the US felt that there were a number of states – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria and even Saudi Arabia itself – helping these groups. The groups and the states needed to be dealt with firmly (as did the remaining bastions of "communism" like North Korea). Clinton was too busy appeasing Yasser Arafat, China and the UN to take such firm action, though the hawks cheered him when he bombed Sudan.

Underlying these three criticisms of the Clinton regime was the key goal the right wing had set for the US. They, like Clinton, knew the US was the sole superpower, but Clinton believed that the best way of maintaining this position was through a multilateral, alliance-building foreign policy.

The hard right believed that the only way to guarantee that no superpower rival could ever emerge (China was their chief suspect) was if the US operated a forceful, unilateralist, military interventionist foreign policy aimed at smashing opposition, deterring potential rivals and building strong outposts of their empire across the entire globe.

Allies prepared to go along with this, like Blair, were welcome. But "old Europe" (France and Germany), the UN and even Nato should all be swept aside if they got in the way.

When George W Bush was appointed President by the supreme court in December 2000, after actually losing the election in terms of the popular vote, these right-wingers at last had their man in the White House. They could now turn their strategy for global domination into reality. Except that the onset of an economic recession deflected them from foreign policy concerns for the first eight months of Dubya's reign.

Then came 9/11, a day that really did change the world.

ers forged their go-it-alone policy

destruction" that might fall into the hands of terrorists. This meant that states could be targeted whether or not they had any proven links with terrorism.

Bush made it perfectly clear last year that this meant a new military doctrine had to prevail. The defence of the US justified attacking selected targets if they were perceived to be a threat – the so-called preemptive doctrine. And he named Iraq, Iran and North Korea – the famous "axis of evil" – as the key targets.

The display of US military might in Afghanistan – and its acquisition of a network of bases in Central Asia as a by-product – was not only designed to kill Mullah Omar and Bin Laden. It was to set a precedent for US intervention and to set an example of what that intervention would mean – a shock and awe campaign designed to frighten any potential rivals.

The National Security Strategy document, published a year after 9/11, spells it out: "The United States possess unprecedented – and unequalled – strength and influence in the world... Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build up in the hopes of surpassing, or equalling, the power of the United States."

This Bush Doctrine says very plainly that all other countries' sovereignty and

established governments are subordinated to the pursuit of US power. This is as upfront and stripped down statement of US imperialism's foreign policy as you could wish for. Its utterly reactionary content provokes revulsion and resistance from democrats the world over.

To make the new policy real required more than just the conquest of Afghanistan, though. A truly strategic target was needed and Iraq fitted the bill perfectly. The PNAC had long argued for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. During the 1998 bombing campaign they called on Clinton to send troops in to secure the south so it could become a base for anti-Saddam activities by Iraqis hostile to the regime. They couched their proposal, as they are couching their filthy war today, in terms of the liberation of the people of Iraq. But liberation has nothing to do with it.

In a Rumsfeld and Cheney co-authored document from January 2001, entitled *Rebuilding America's Defences*, the warmongers wrote: "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein."

In other words, the strategic signifi-

cance of the Gulf – both in terms of control of vital sea lanes and control over the world's largest oil fields – dictates that the US should run the area by force of arms. It is as plain and as simple as that.

Nor is it just a question of plundering Iraq's oil, important as that is. The US would use its control to push down the price of oil produced by other countries, notably Saudi Arabia. *The Economist* noted: "If it [Iraq] were to produce oil at a rate to match its reserves... it could end Saudi Arabia's domination of world oil markets. That would not come too soon for the United States."

All of this was true before 9/11. But the attack on New York and Washington added a new dimension: the "war against terror" and al-Qaida. Stratfor, an influential private intelligence agency in the US, recently explained the significance of Iraq in this fight: "Iraq is a means toward an end... the primary purpose of the Iraq war is to set the stage for undermining the foundations of al Qaida in particular and of radical Islam as an effective paramilitary force in general."

"The United States has tried to find the centre of gravity of al Qaida – the one spot which, if struck, would cause the system itself to collapse. Al Qaida is structured to deny an attacker the luxury

of a centre of gravity. The closest the United States could get to one would be the support systems upon which al Qaida depends – financial support and distribution, recruitment, command and control centres, training centres... Those support systems, in turn, have locations."

Occupying Iraq gives the US a base from which to exert maximum pressure and further regime change to stem the rise of Islamic opposition to US imperialism.

All of this explains why – in defiance of the clear will of the majority of the world and in defiance of every shred of evidence concerning supposed weapons of mass destruction – the US was going to attack Iraq. Nothing mattered to it except its strategic goal of securing control of the Gulf. From its new Iraqi colony – should it win – the US can, at a time of its own choosing, attack Iran and undermine Saudi Arabia. It can hit the bases of the militant Islamic fundamentalists, it believes, secure its future fuel supplies and underscore its capacity to dominate the globe.

Despite the power that the PNAC clique has today time for them is running out. By gleefully blowing up the old institutions, like the UN, by fomenting divisions between imperialist powers, by believing their own fantasy that the only thing that counts in the world is US military power guarding

a world economy geared to paying lavish tributes to the US corporations and above all by launching unjust wars in the teeth of massive global opposition, these people are digging their own graves.

Already their two wars have seen millions march against them. Already they have found out that when people resist, as fiercely as the Iraqi people are doing today, their wars will cost the lives of their soldiers in ever greater numbers. And already, their management of the capitalist system will cause problems as they pour money into defence spending against a background of economic decline and recession.

Their candour allows all of us anti-imperialists to point the finger at them and say look, this is the slave empire they want to build, and you are to be its slaves. Rise against them before it's too late. And the thing is, however internally coherent their project for a new American century is, millions believe us, the socialists, the anti-imperialists, the revolutionaries. Millions are rallying to our side, not theirs. And it is in our power to wreck their project, to smash their power and to destroy their system.

It will not only be the UN that dies in the Iraqi war. It will also mark the beginning of the end for Bush and his leathern band of pirates.

Arab masses' fury at imperialist onslaught



The Middle East has seen huge demonstrations against war and against the region's regimes, writes *Dave Stockton*

As soon as the carnage on the streets of Baghdad began to appear on the TV screens in Arab and Islamic countries, popular anger began to turn into action.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of the Syrian capital Damascus on Tuesday 25 March, shouting hostile slogans against Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, as well as the King and Emirs of Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar.

Al Jazeera has given extensive coverage to these demonstrations and to uncensored Arab criticism of the Americans. As a result US Secretary of State Colin Powell has accused it of making Iraqi propaganda and its websites have suffered a string of hacker assaults.

The war in Iraq has turned Fridays, the Muslim Sabbath, into demonstrations of barely contained rage in Jordan, where King Abdullah is a craven tool of the British and Americans. The anglicised monarch has covertly supported the coalition invasion of Iraq. On the first Friday after the war began, 21 March, the Jordanian government reported 55 anti-war protests throughout the country, including violent clashes in the southern city of Maan, and in the Palestinian Al-Wihdat refugee camp.

On the second Friday, 28 March, in Amman 3,000 antiwar protesters were stopped by riot police, who prevented them from reaching the Israeli Embassy. In Maan, thousands protested after Friday prayers, and police used tear gas to disperse one crowd.

In Iran, on 28 March, the first anti-war

demonstration was allowed. Demonstrators stoned the British Embassy in Tehran, breaking its windows demanding it be closed. The Ayatollah who delivered the Friday sermon, broadcast on Iranian television, Mohammed Yazdi, denounced the war. The worshippers responded with loud shouts of "death to America," and "death to Britain."

The Egyptian Interior Ministry announced that peaceful street protests would be allowed provided the organisers notify authorities in advance. Since 1981, when Mubarak came to power, public rallies in Egypt have been legal only on university campuses or within mosque complexes. So much for the "democracy" of Washington's most reliable Arab ally.

For the first time since the 1970s, Egyptians took over Midan Tahrir (Revolution Square) on 20 March and the next day witnessed battles between demonstrators and riot police along the broad avenues of the city centre.

There were around 3-4,000 people in Midan Tahrir (Freedom Square) on 20 March. Youth commented in delight "Our Hyde Park!" - a testimony to the global consciousness of the anti-war movement.

The next day there were 10,000 on the streets of Cairo, and a number of smaller demonstrations up and down the country. There were heavy clashes between police and demonstrators on Friday 21 March. Demonstrators assembled in the city's mosques before flooding out onto the streets, where riot police used tear gas and water cannon on them.

Official counts put the injured from the two days at around 100, though many believe it to be higher and the Lawyers' Association claimed that over 800 people have subsequently been detained by the police.

In Cairo, on 28 March the demonstration started at the huge and ancient Al-Azhar mosque. As soon as some 20,000 worshippers had finished praying, the anti-war chants began. For a while, the police block-

This uprising of the "Arab street" has sent a shiver of horror through the rulers of the Arab states

aded the doors of the mosque.

Eventually, however, they were forced open, and people pouring out onto the street were deluged by water cannon. But this did not stop them marching onto Al-Azhar Street

Co-ordinating their movements by mobile phone, students from the American University in Cairo joined with Islamist and Nasserist protesters to march from the mosque, past the five-star hotels into Tahrir Square again

The last period in which Cairo's central square was "occupied" by demonstrators was at the height of the 1972 left-wing student movement then shaking the country with its demand for democracy, eco-

nomie and social equality and a "people's war" against Israel, which was occupying Egypt's Sinai Peninsula at the time.

Slogans chanted this time included: "The people's first demand is shut the US embassy and expel the ambassador!"; "Down with the USA, we won't be ruled by the CIA!"; "We won't be ruled by imperialism!"; "Down Bush, down Blair, down Aznar!"; "We give our souls and blood to you Baghdad"; and "Why are the Arab leaders silent?".

As night fell hundreds of candles lit up the square and protesters sang songs by poet Ahmed Fouad Negm and the late Sheikh Imam. Both were famous in the 1960s and 1970s and expressed in their lyrics the revolutionary fervour of Arab students and workers during strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations. It was important that these songs were heard again from a new generation of political activists.

This uprising of the "Arab street" has sent a shiver of horror through the rulers of the Arab states. Many of them are already pensioners of the USA and have been offered huge bribes to keep their opposition to the war purely platonic and to suppress their own citizens' anger.

King Abdullah of Jordan stands to gain more than 1.1 billion dollars - £700 million to offset the economic effects of the war with neighbouring Iraq and 406 million in military aid. Small wonder he has covertly let the US military use his country to help their war.

Egypt is set to receive 300 million dollars to assist its economy and an offer to secure up to two billion dollars in loan guar-

antees. This on top of the nearly three billion dollars in aid, military equipment and loans it receives annually.

If the heroic tens of thousands of young militants can force an opening on the streets of Cairo, Damascus, Amman and even Riyadh, for the millions who detest this war and support the brave Iraqi resistance then these rotten regimes could begin to tumble like ninepins.

Then it will not be simply a question of stopping the imperialist war but of starting the revolution against imperialism and its local agents in the Arab world.

That is why the western anti-war movement must take actions of practical solidarity with the movements in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt. In Egypt hundreds of anti-war activists have been arrested, beaten up and tortured, over the past weeks and months.

For information on these cases contact Jonathan Neale of the International Campaign against Aggression against Iraq at: findjonathan@hotmail.com
Send protests to: President Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Telegram: President of the Republic, Cairo, Egypt. Fax: + 202 390 1998
E-mail: webmaster@presidency.gov.eg
And to General Habib al-Adeli, Ministry of the Interior
Telegram: Minister Interior, Cairo, Egypt. Fax: + 202 579 2031
E-mail: moi@idsc.gov.eg
The phone number of the Egyptian embassy in London is 0207-499-2401.

US firms to benefit by the billions

Washington has earmarked the companies that will be rebuilding Iraq - and guess what? They're all American

If the USA wins the war who will rule Iraq? Step forward retired US general Jay Garner. He heads the Orwellian-titled "Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance" set up by the US government. He will rule Iraq like a viceroy for an unspecified period, with four appointed regional governors - all US politicians.

So who is general Garner? The British, when they ruled the world used to appoint people with great cultural sympathy for the peoples they oppressed. Hence the Arabist TE Lawrence was sent to stir up Arabia, while Africa buff Cecil Rhodes was allowed to bestride South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The Bush administration clearly takes a different stance. Garner is a leading figure in the US lobby group, the Jewish Institute for National Affairs and a friend and adviser to Ariel Sharon. He has been on paid "fact finding trips" to Israel and in 2000 signed a declaration blaming the Palestinians for the conflict in the Middle East. The man who will rule the cradle of civilisation hates Islam and hates the Arabs.

So far, Garner has not shown his face

in southern Iraq - he is reportedly skulking around the Gulf. But the true face of what American "reconstruction" will mean was revealed in the widely leaked contracts to reconstruct Iraq after the war.

USAID - the American equivalent of Clare Short's department - published seven contracts for reconstruction. Work worth around \$1 billion is to be awarded only to American companies. The company that gets the big capital and construction contract will not only rebuild bridges, roads and water systems, but also the education and health systems.

The overtly political nature of the contract is spelled out: "The US government envisions a post-war reconstruction effort as a highly visible symbol of good faith toward building trust for economic, social and cultural benefits as well as for political stability in the region."

And, indeed, the contract blurs at the edges between physical reconstruction and what any civil servant or international lawyer would recognise as political reconstruction. The key words in the contract are explicit

that the winning company should do the physical repairs "while at the same time laying the foundation for policy, institutional and financial reforms".

It envisages that the contractor will "develop a restructuring and reforms roadmap which will identify future longer term needs and investments to sustain the operations of the above sectors both financially and institutionally". What role the Iraqi people will have in setting out their own roadmaps for public services is not spelled out. In practice, they will have no role.

Informing the seven reconstruction contracts is another document, again leaked to the press, called *Vision for post-conflict Iraq*.

In a crucial section called Economic Governance the plan outlines Iraq's major problem: "Iraq's economy is dominated by the state and has been isolated by sanctions, constraining economic viability and deterring economic integration and growth...all heavy and many light industries and services are government owned."

The solution to this "problem" is pri-

vatation. The plan calls for:

- "Programmes (to) promote competitiveness and foreign trade" (i.e. ones that favour the Washington trade policies of the WTO and World Bank)
- "Legal framework hospitable to private businesses"
- "Privatisation of state-owned businesses" within 18 months, together with the creation of private banks.

The whole economic programme, known as the "Washington consensus", which America struggles to impose on countries like Argentina and Brazil, is to be imposed on Iraq in a policy walkover. It is doubtful that Jay Garner will be putting up much opposition to it.

The problem all this raises for Tony Blair is acute. For even as Blair flew to Camp David to try and tie Bush into some form of UN-backed regime in post-war Iraq, Clare Short's Department for International Development issued the following statement:

"Without a UN mandate for the reconstruction of Iraq, coalition countries would have the status of occupying powers under

international law following military action. This would severely hinder Iraq's longer term development prospects, as steps to reform Iraqi government institutions would be illegal under international law. Ms Short hopes that agreement on a UN mandate for the reconstruction of Iraq will enable the World Bank, IMF, the UN and development agencies to play a full part in the reconstruction of Iraq."

Tony Blair came away empty handed from Camp David. There is to be no UN mandate for reconstruction. France's president Chirac made it clear that the only way the French would allow the UN to administer post war Iraq was if the UN itself regained control of what's going on. Since Bush is not prepared to cede control, the UN will not be allowed to rubber stamp Bush's plans.

As with the bombing of Iraq, so with the privatising and looting of Iraq's economy: Blair seeks a UN rubber-stamp, fails, Bush carries on regardless, Claire Short wrestles with her conscience and no doubt, once again, drop kicks it out of the ring.

Rachel Corrie: American martyr with Palestinian blood

The killing of Rachel Corrie is part of the latest intimidation of activists in Palestine, writes Max from the ISM

On 16 March, Rachel Corrie, an International Solidarity Movement (ISM) volunteer, was murdered by the Israeli army in Rafah, Gaza strip. Her death is a cruel blow. Yet it is also a testimony to the effective work done by the "internationals" in the past 18 months in highlighting Israeli human rights abuses and resisting the Zionist occupation.

Since its first campaign in August 2001, the ISM has had to consider the possibility that it may have members murdered by the Israelis. The first organised demo the ISM attended was rained with bullets, and a number of internationals were shot, though none killed.

The ISM has, perversely, benefited from the racism of the Zionists. The Israelis are taught to see Arabs as sub-human. So when faced with an American or a Swedish human rights activist, an Israeli soldier knows two things: that they are usually white, and that their government is powerful.

Internationals can travel fairly freely in Palestine; they can approach soldiers and ask them what legal basis they have for indefinitely detaining a Palestinian at a check point; they can phone the Jewish human rights organisations and pressurise them to do something in their own country about human rights abuses; and they can live with the family of a martyr whose house is likely to be demolished.

This has been a successful operation for the ISM. It has built solidarity, strong links with the community leaders, and a trust amongst the Palestinian people in the areas in which they operate. Many more people in the west are aware of the situation in Palestine because of their work, and



Left: Rachel demonstrating in the West Bank and above confronting one of the bulldozers that minutes later killed her

indeed many more people are going out to Palestine to join their campaigns all year round.

The reality of life on the ground in West Bank and Gaza is appalling. Since the Israeli invasion in 1967 more than 7,000 homes have been destroyed, leaving 30,000 homeless and destitute; more than 2000 have died since the second intifada began in September 2000.

Deaths during house demolitions are common: on 3 March this year, 33-year-old Nuha Sweidan (9-months pregnant) was crushed to death by the demolition of her neighbour's home. These demolitions constitute collective punishment, and they contravene the Universal Declaration of Human Rights articles 12 and 25, and articles 33, 53 and 54 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The ISM members, along with other similar groups, are really the only interna-

tional observers who can bear witness to this crime against humanity. One important and consistent area of work for the ISM is to try to protect homes which are likely to be demolished – staying with the families and confronting the Israeli army when they arrive.

As such, they stand firmly in the way of the expansionist aims of the government of Israel, and Sharon is keen to have them removed.

A campaign of intimidation and physical abuse against the ISM members on the ground has been stepped up in recent months. Local co-ordinators have been arrested, detained, or forcibly removed from the country. Members have been regularly shot at, beaten, and verbally threatened with rape. Sharon hopes that by killing Rachel the internationals will get the message: "stay away!"

The significance of Rachel's death should

not be underestimated. It has been discussed by the leadership of the PLO, and Hamas leaders have issued a statement in the subject. Leaders of all local parties attended her funeral wake.

The world's media has been forced to publicise the fateful event – though of course with varying degrees of hypocritical blame for Rachel and the ISM rather than Israel. Even Amnesty International (USA), which has a shameful record of not documenting human rights abuses in Israel, has called on the Caterpillar Corporation to suspend its sales of equipment to the Israeli Army.

In Palestine, Rachel is considered a "Shahida" (Martyr), and Arafat has awarded her the Bethlehem 2000 Award for Peace. A newly born Lebanese child has been named after her, as will be a street in Beirut and indeed a scholarship in The Islamic Association for Scientific Specialisation and Orientation.

An ISM activist recently wrote that since Rachel's death, he has been told many times that "you are one of us now... You were a foreigner before, but now you know what it is to be a Palestinian." Graffiti on a wall in Rafah reads "Rachel Corrie, an American Citizen with Palestinian blood."

On hearing of Rachel's death, Revolution supporters, several of whom have served as international volunteers themselves, organised a vigil at the Israeli embassy in London to put pressure on the Israeli government to take this incident seriously.

A letter to her family from Revolution made clear that young people will draw strength from her courage:

"The best tribute that we could pay Rachel is to carry on the campaign for justice and freedom. We must not let the IDF's brutality undermine our determination to struggle in solidarity with the Palestinians. We must re-double our efforts to end the nightmare of occupation.

"More of our members are planning to go to Palestine this year to take part in the work of the ISM, plus we will be building the ISM campaign and encouraging everyone we meet to get involved in whatever way they can.

"We offer our solidarity to all the international and Palestinian activists that are struggling on against oppression.

"No justice, no peace."

Israel has raised the stakes for international volunteers. We must not be intimidated. We must take up the call for support in even greater numbers.

● For more information go to www.ism-london.org.uk, www.palsolidarity.org and the Rachel Corrie website is at www.distanceeddesign.com/rachel

Road map to peace or highway to hell?

George Bush's plan for a Palestinian state will leave intact Israeli control over the Occupied Territories

The invasion and occupation of Iraq is one element of the USA's grand design to reshape the Middle East. Central to the project is to reduce or eliminate any Arab threat to Israel, Washington's key agent in the region.

By removing Saddam Hussein, Bush will destroy not only a source of ideological hostility to the Zionist state but a source of practical financial support for many families of the victims of Israeli aggression in the West Bank and Gaza. Bush hopes the destruction of the Baghdad regime will result in a further lowering of the Palestinian resistance to a settlement with Israel on the Sharon's terms.

Last month, the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, took a step in that direction by surrendering most of his powers to a new prime minister who Israel and Washington had lined up for the job – Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen.

Abbas has long been Arafat's deputy in the Fatah faction of the PLO and was the key Palestinian negotiator of the disastrous Oslo accords in 1993. He has been the main opponent inside the PLO leadership of the intifada since it was launched in September 2000.

Israel had previously denounced him for

supporting terrorism, and he was widely vilified as a "Holocaust denier". But now the Israeli army has suddenly removed from its website extracts from a thesis and book by Abbas that question whether the Nazis used gas chambers to exterminate Jews, and which said that the number murdered was "less than a million".

Bush refused to release a US-backed road map for a Middle East peace settlement before Abbas' appointment. This road map, crafted by the quartet of the US, European Union, Russia and the UN has still to be released but it envisages a Palestinian state by the end of 2005.

It calls for an end to Israeli settlement construction and the dismantling of all settlements built after March 2001.

According to the plan, a supreme co-ordinating committee will be established, and will be headed by a representative of the US administration with representatives from the US, Russia, the UN and the European Union, Israel and the Palestinians in tow.

Naturally, Israel has launched a diplomatic offensive to delay its publication and dilute most of its measures. The Israelis have proposed more than 100 changes to the original road map, according to *Ha'aretz* newspaper. The Israeli plan:

- Eliminates the 2005 timetable set out in the road map and in Bush's speech.
- Counterposes to the map's vague reference to an independent Palestinian state a notion of a Palestine with the characteristics of sovereignty and details its own plans for a demilitarised state with Israeli-controlled entrances, exits and airspace.
- Requires Palestinians to meet a series of demands – including establishing a ceasefire and launching political reforms – before Israel does anything. The original road map requires Israel to take several steps, including dismantling settlement outposts, allowing Palestinian officials to travel, and halting home demolitions and the destruction of infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Sharon continues to make facts on the ground. During February he launched a merciless assault on the Gaza strip and his troops have killed more than 40 people in that time, including leaders of Hamas who are actively resisting the Israeli occupation.

His government is also building a "separation wall" between the West Bank and Israel which is marking out a de facto political border that defines the geographical limits of a shrivelled Palestinian state on around 40 per cent of the West Bank.

Sharon's bet is that the "provisional borders" will ultimately become the final ones, no matter what the road map may suggest. Meanwhile, issues such as the future of Jerusalem's Arab quarters and Muslim holy sites, and the millions of Palestinian refugees, will be deferred indefinitely, with explosive consequences for both any new state and the region as a whole.

More than 36 years of occupation have seen thousands of Palestinians killed and hundreds of thousands detained and beaten. Israeli armed garrisons (settlements) pepper the Occupied Territories. The anger this has generated will not abate in the face of the promise of a miserable bantustan style state.

For the vast majority of Palestinians such statehood will be all but meaningless. Abbas will grasp the road map as a political and diplomatic lifeline.

Instead of a road map for a fictitious state the Palestinians need an immediate end to occupation and colonisation. Israeli troops and colonisers must withdraw from Palestinian soil. Palestine's fight for national determination must be supported by all in the anti-war movement so that its people are not allowed to become pawns in an Israeli and imperialist chess game.

Argentina: defend the Zanon occupation

Zanon is a ceramics factory in Neuquén, in the south-west of Argentina, which has been occupied for over a year by its workers. The Zanon workers continue to produce despite several attempts to evict them, which they have successfully prevented.

They have won powerful support from other workers in the community - from teachers, health sector workers, unemployed organisations and the Mapuche indigenous population of the region. They have been an inspiration to other struggles and have played a vital role in building solidarity with others as well as winning it for their own cause.

Zanon workers toured Europe late last year and made valuable links with workers in Italy and in Britain, including with Unison and the RMT.

Despite this support they are now facing a new attempt to evict them. Judge Norma Poza has authorised the forcible eviction of the Zanon ceramics factory. If this ruling is carried out it will mean the violent expulsion of the workforce.

As soon as Zanon's workers heard about the ruling they sent a delegation to speak with the authorities, but both local and national government departments refused to receive them, despite the fact that the delegation was accompanied by local MPs from opposition parties.

The Zanon workers have organised an intense campaign and a huge number of activities since the ruling. They have reinforced the guard in the factory with the help of the unemployed organisations like the MTD and have received strong support from the Alto Valle co-ordinating committee and from various social and political organisations.

A committee for the defence of the Zanon factory was set up on 17 March. This committee is composed of social movements, trade unions and political organisations, and is committed to the defence of workers' management. The provincial grouping of the CTA - one of the three trade union confederations in Argentina - has promised to call for a provincial strike if the eviction is carried out.

The third national meeting of occupied factories took place in the city of Rosario on 15 March; there the call for the defence of the factories was ratified under the slogan "An injury to one is an injury to all".

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared - the thousands of democratic activists murdered by the military regime of the 1970s and early 1980s - have expressed their support for the Zanon workers' struggle and they are organising a Caravan of Solidarity, led by their president, Hebe de Bonafini. The caravan will be leaving Buenos Aires on 28 March and will be arriving in Neuquén the following day to participate in a rally called by the workers of the factory under the slogans:

- Stop the eviction.
- For the defence of jobs and self-management at Zanon.
- Nationalisation without compensation under workers' control.

In a country plagued by unemployment, where workers are only offered a miserable 150 pesos benefit in return for community work, Zanon workers have shown that another way is possible. A month ago they created 30 new jobs that were distributed among unemployed people in the region.

The capitalists have shown that they can neither keep the factory open nor guarantee jobs, let alone provide a solution to the high level of unemployment in the country.

The ceramic workers are now able to pay themselves a wage of 800 pesos and have guaranteed work and food for 1,500 people. On a small scale, this is an example of what the working class could more generally do if it held political power. That explains why the government and bosses and their political parties want to silence the Zanon struggle - and they are counting on the help of the trade union bureaucracy.

Last week the radical Canadian author of *No Logo*, Naomi Klein, visited Neuquén province in the course of researching and filming a documentary on the phenomenon of the occupied factories in Argentina. She declared: "Zanon is seen all over the world as a symbol and an example of a new movement", and told the local press that she was impressed both by "the sense of communion in the factory" as well as by "what has been achieved by the workers".

Let's spread the example of Zanon across the country, the continent and the world - don't let the bosses attack it.

Messages of support to Zanon workers can be sent to:

ceramistasneuquen@hotmail.com

FOR MORE ON ZANON SEE:

<http://www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/Argentina-Scabs.html>

Blood, cuts and tears

Last month, Germany's chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, presented his long-awaited address. It had been billed as a "blood and tears" appeal to the people but, as *Martin Suchanek* in Berlin explains, that will only apply to the working class

In his speech, German Chancellor Helmut Schroeder summed up his policy on unemployment, workers' rights and the welfare sector in one word: cuts!

Of course, this is not the first social democratic government to take "tough measures" against the working class. But this speech was not only more blunt, it also left out all the usual promises that "painful decisions" would pave the way to later improvements for workers. This time there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

The key points in Schroeder's package were:

- Further cuts in unemployment benefits, to a maximum of 12 months from their present 32-month maximum.
- Unemployment benefits to be reduced to social security levels, cutting 12bn Euros (more than £8bn) of spending.
- Job protection to be scrapped for new employees.
- The unions are expected to agree "voluntarily" to a big reduction in the scope of national wage contracts - and if they don't, laws will be brought in to enforce this.
- Health insurance contributions are to be raised to increase "personal responsibility" - in other words the employers' payments, traditionally always equal to the workers', will not be raised.

Schroeder's speech came against the background of 4.7 million registered unemployed, more than 11 per cent, and a stagnant economy. The German stock market has lost some 50 per cent of its value since 2000. Profits of the large multinationals like Volkswagen and Siemens have shrunk sharply.

Ever since Schroeder's narrow election victory, Germany's bosses have been pressing for these reforms. There has been an incessant media campaign against "the unions' chancellor" while, from the other side, workers have been growing more and more disaffected with the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Schroeder and Fischer's foreign policy, their verbal opposition to the war in Iraq, has certainly been popular, but this has not



Schroeder and Chirac. Schroeder's anti-war stance made him popular at home but his economic programme sets out to attack the working class

rescued the SPD. It now commands a mere 30 per cent in the opinion polls. The party lost the last regional and communal elections in landslide defeats. In Hessen and Lower Saxony, hundreds of thousand workers abstained.

Schroeder's response was a further move towards the neo-liberal agenda of the bosses' parties, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Liberals (FDP). The bosses, however, did not applaud his speech. It was a step in the right direction, they said, but only a step.

In particular, they have targeted the nationally negotiated collective wage agreements which still cover whole industries. Every worker, so the bosses insist, should be free to work for less money and to be "more flexible". Measured against this, Schroeder's plan is far too weak.

To give the appearance of even-handedness, the government rejected some of the proposals of its most pro-business figure, Clement, who called for continued subsidies to companies. However, Schroeder knows that these could still be reinstated by the CDU majority in the Bundesrat, the German parliament's second chamber.

The current attacks are not the first since reunification, but they are the harshest. Practically every gain made by the (West) German workers in the 1970s and 1980s is now under threat.

The reason is simple. German business has become more powerful in the last decade. German imperialism has made real advances in overcoming the legal restrictions on its political and military operations. The biggest gain was the rolling out of the Euro in 2000-2, the most important economic challenge yet to US hegemony over the world. Schroeder's opposition to Bush and Blair's war on Iraq and the global "war on terror" is also part of the joint effort, with France, to build a rival imperialist block in Europe.

But German capital has also come up against problems. Competition is increasing in over-supplied world markets. The crisis over Iraq has shown that inter-imperialist rivalry has sharpened more quickly than many expected.

To improve Germany's positions in the world market and to challenge US supremacy, there needs to be not only a deepening of relations with France, Russia and China but a dramatic change in the balance of forces within Germany itself.

The bosses and their parties make no secret of their intentions. The CDU's Friedrich Mertz argues that, "the power of the unions must be broken". He insists that there is no justification for organisations "led by blockheads" who organise less than a quarter of all employed people to "dictate the level of wages to the employers".

What the bosses doubt is whether Schroeder's government is the right vehicle for this. Undoubtedly, it is willing to attack the working class, but the SPD's links with the unions are always a potential restraint on its freedom to manoeuvre.

What did the trade union leaders do? They issued a statement. They welcomed the government's peace policy and its support for economic growth but criticised the "unbalanced approach" which made appeals to the bosses but massive financial attacks on the workers.

As to flexibilisation of contracts, they had been moving in that direction for years anyway and were glad to see the Chancellor supporting continued "co-determination" between the employers and unions. Finally, they welcomed an increase in the number of training places, although they would have liked to see a levy on employers to pay for them.

In short, they did their best to minimise the scale of the government's attacks. Yet again, they showed themselves to be an obstacle to an effective fight.

The government is under such pressure to carry through its attacks that only a massive, countrywide campaign of strikes and demonstrations will be enough to stop them in their tracks.

But who is going to organise this? How can it be built? To call on the trade union leaders, necessary as it is, will not be enough. Experience shows that they will only move if they are forced to by pressure from the rank and file.

Committees of action have to be built in the workplaces. An opposition rank and file movement in the unions and workplaces is urgently needed, one which can and must take the lead in action. Existing struggles and campaigns have to be brought together to combine their forces.

A significant step towards this was taken in Berlin on the day Schroeder made his speech. Taking their lead from the movement in Italy, 50 organisations and campaigns sent delegates to the founding meeting of the Berlin Social Forum.

Such forums, bring together union activists, workplace delegates, unemployed initiatives, workers' organisations, women's and immigrant organisations, the youth, the students and the pensioners. They need to be formed in towns and cities across the country.

Crucially, the workers, the anti-capitalists and the activists in the Social Forums and the anti-war movement, must be won to a political alternative. We need a new workers' party, a party which will respond to the all-out attack of the bosses and their government by an all-out revolutionary attack on their system.

FIRE BRIGADES DISPUTE

Take control to win!

The Brighton Conference of the FBU rejected the 16 per cent deal that Andy Gilchrist and the union executive had recommended swallowing.

Despite a few last minute tweaks to the wording, this was essentially the same offer that has been on the table since the Bain report was published. In return for an offer slightly above inflation over three years, the union is expected to sign away its national bargaining rights and lay down while local managers destroy working conditions, jobs and safety across Britain.

In recommending acceptance of the deal Gilchrist turned a corner. He is convinced the union is not strong enough to beat the employers because the government has intervened. But he is not prepared to argue for the tactics that could turn the tide, and not prepared to acknowledge to the wider membership that his tactics have failed. That's why he tried to get the Executive and the delegate conference to take responsibility for the climbdown.

In recommending the deal, Gilchrist waved the white flag just one day before the strike action would have been at its most powerful: during a war. Even now, with no strike action, the government claims 20,000 troops are "tied down" and cannot be sent to the Gulf. That's how powerful the FBU action could have been. And that shows that Gilchrist



Days of hope. Rank and file control can renew the strike's momentum

- despite being one of the anti-war union leaders - backed off under political pressure from Prescott not to strike during the war.

The rejection of the deal was led by rank and file militants who have always been critical of Gilchrist's hesitant tactics. Winning the vast majority of conference delegates

marked a turning point for them too. In the past, the top echelons of the FBU have run the union like a Stalinist club: those who criticise the leadership are marched out of offices, see their email accounts frozen and their union mobiles taken away.

Now there is the real basis for an alter-

native leadership in the union. Now the rank and file have shown their power, some of the left-wing allies of Gilchrist in the leadership will have a counterweight to contend with: the will of the membership. So it is entirely possible to win back a majority on the Executive for renewed action. Even if the executive remains pro-surrender, the job is now to create a national strike committee that will take control of the dispute out of its hands.

Of course Prescott has two weapons at his disposal: he could ban the strikes on grounds of war, or impose a settlement under the 1946 Fire Services Act. This would be politically costly, hastening union disaffiliations and the membership leaks from Labour. Already prominent Labour supporting firefighters in Suffolk have left the party to set up a "Firefighters Against the Cuts Party".

However, the war itself is a factor in the dispute. No one should pretend otherwise. The growing mood of discontent with the war will turn into open rebellion against New Labour if the war turns really bad.

At that point the FBU will be at its strongest. If Labour ends the war in disarray it will be looking for all means possible to save itself - killing off Foundation Hospitals and Tuition Fees will be two easy morsels to throw to the masses. Settling

with the FBU will be another. If at that point the union has simply settled for 16 per cent there will be no way back.

It is clear that Prescott used the threat to impose a settlement as a lever to get Gilchrist to recommend acceptance of the "final final" offer.

Gilchrist wrote to the members on 21 March, after Prescott threatened to impose a deal: "The decision taken at the forthcoming Recall of Conference (15 April) or the latest offer must take account of today's statement. I would hope the members would now appreciate the dilemma and difficulty the Executive Council faced when taking the decision [to recommend acceptance]".

Between now and 15 April the task is to build up support for renewed national action. It may be that the war will still be in progress then. If it is, Blair and Prescott will be in serious trouble. If not then Prescott's whole rationale for the imposed settlement will be exposed as the lame excuse it really is.

A rank and file led strike could rally support from across the Labour movement even the TUC leaders could not stand back while a key part of the union movement saw a no-strike deal imposed on it. Time is short - but with hundreds of thousands on the streets against war in wartime, everything is possible.

Abused in the name of the Fathers

FILM REVIEW

Joy Macready reviews the *Magdalene Sisters*, Directed by Peter Mullan, Winner of the Golden Lion Award in Venice 2002

"You will work beyond human endurance to remove the sins you have committed - without food and sleep, 52 weeks a year. The laundry will clean away your sins."

Three Catholic girls stand before the Mother Superior, Sister Brigitte, who is counting the money from the laundry business. The nun is cruel and unflinching as she inducts them into the Magdalene Asylum. Everything is stripped from them: their dignity, their lives, their health, and their names. Strip them of their identity. And wash their sins away.

The *Magdalene Sisters*, the second film by Scottish actor and director Peter Mullan, exposes the systematic exploitation, deprivation, humiliation, rape and abuse of women in these institutions under the moral authority of the Catholic Church. Its simple construction effectively lays bare the conditions that women were forced to suffer under and uncovers a long buried secret that the Church wished would stay buried.

More than 30,000 Irish women were jailed in the Magdalene Asylums. Their "crimes" against society ranged from having an illegitimate baby to being in "moral danger" - like being attractive. The asylums, named after Mary Magdalene the prostitute who repented and was forgiven by Jesus, were set up in the late 18th Century in response to increasing worries regarding prostitution, venereal disease and the moral health of the country.

The control of women's sexuality became of extreme importance in this era because the 18th Century was the age of privatisation, not in the modern sense of selling off national industry, but in terms of privati-

sation of communal land and of the body. As the English prose writer, Samuel Johnson, said: "The chastity is of all importance, as all property depends on it."

These asylums were the blunt end of the morality crusade, which reached fever pitch in Britain and Ireland during the infamous Victorian era. The biblical reference was based on the premise that these women could be redeemed and "saved" from their life of immorality and possible early death. The work symbolised the purging of sin by the washing of dirty linen. The Church battled social ills by incarcerating women, not in state institutions but in "voluntary" asylums, where they worked as slaves with no pay, locked in their dormitories and ostracised from society.

But that was the 18th and 19th centuries and this is Dublin in 1964. A time of burgeoning sexual freedom across the western world - except for the (very) Catholic Church dominated Ireland. As Bernadette says, "All the mortal sins in the world wouldn't justify this place". Yet justified and maintained it was in a country strapped down by the chains of an institution built on ignorance and fear.

All three girls are "fallen women" in the eyes of the Church and society: Margaret was raped by her cousin and she made the mistake of telling her father; Bernadette was pretty - a "temptress" - and an orphan who was locked away before she became a problem; and Rose had a child before she was married. "A child out of wedlock is a bastard child, scorned and hated by all of society," said the priest as he takes her baby away.

"You're in here 'cause you like to go with the lads. You like to get your knickers off," said the delivery boy to Bernadette. The Church viewed women's sexuality as the reason for the moral transgression of men. The *Magdalene Sisters* shows the all-pervasive and deeply perverse influence of the Catholic Church's dogma throughout the fabric of the Irish society.

It is not just sexual oppression that the church propagates but intense women's oppression. The *Magdalene Sisters* reveals the place of women in a patriarchal Catholic society. Bluntly, women have no rights of their own as far as Catholicism is concerned. These young women are locked up for indefinite sentences. Even older women had no right to leave. They had no control over their lives. The men of the family and community held all the power.

One scene illustrates this very clearly. After four years of slave labour, Margaret's brother arrives with a note signed by the priest ordering her release. Sister Brigitte just nods. Margaret can't move with astonishment: astonishment that it is that easy; that all it took was a note. Bernadette and Rose decide to risk escape despite the threat of a severe beating because, as Bernadette says, "We will be here forever. No one is coming for us."

What is really shocking is that the last Magdalene Asylum only closed in 1996. Tens of thousands of women across the globe, from Rio de Janeiro to Adelaide, were exploited, abused and terrorised in these institutions. The truth is only now coming out.

Yet the Church is refusing to take responsibility for the crimes of its past, claiming

that the women "volunteered" so they have no legal rights. It is on a par with its refusal to take responsibility for vast numbers of child abusers it nurtured and then covered up for, often blaming the victims for the crimes of the priests.

Needless to say, this film has caused furore within the Catholic Church. The film has opened at a time when the Church in Ireland is under a lot of pressure to respond to the allegations of systematic sexual abuse within the Christian Brotherhood and complicity in this by the higher echelons of the clergy.

That pressure is, thankfully, eating away at the pernicious influence the Church has in Ireland. And while women do have more rights today there than in 1964, using contraception is still branded a sin, divorce is still difficult and abortion is illegal.

Such outrages against women's rights are the direct product of the continuing grip that a medieval institution still has on modern European state. And the black-cassocked soldiers of this institution are fighting hard to hold on to what they have got. At the Venice Film Festival 2002, where *Magdalene Sisters* won the Golden Lion Award, Peter Mullan reported a revealing incident: "Two priests were outside the festival screening with video cameras, and as the audience was going in they were filming people, as if to say 'We know who you are!' They also said that even by watching the film, people were committing a sin. The gave people a chance to leave. This was 2002 and they actually thought that they had right to do this - to threaten them with the immortal soul!"



Keep up the action!
Stop your school. Stop work. Stop everything. They are bombing Iraqi civilians. We can stop it

Join the global revolt against Bush and Blair

Despite failing to prevent the launch of the US/UK invasion of Iraq, the multi-millioned global anti-war movement has already achieved great results.

In Turkey the tens of thousands that surrounded the Turkish parliament prevented the government from agreeing to US troops and supplies moving into Iraq from Turkey. This has delayed the opening of a northern front by weeks and given the Iraqi people respite.

In Spain tens of thousands take to the street nearly every day. Opinion polls after one week of the war confirmed that 91 per cent of the population oppose Aznar's backing for the war. It has prevented him from deploying more than token forces in support of the US and Britain. Defections from the ruling PP occur daily and the anti-war Socialist Party has reversed Aznar's commanding lead in the opinion polls.

Even the way the war is being fought - seeking to avoid mass civilian casualties - is a function of the global anti-war movement hostility. The only way Bush and Blair can try to hold on to the support they do have is to wrap their war aims in a cloak of lies that portrays their aggression as a bid to free the Iraqi people from Saddam.

Even this lie is wearing thin as Bush and Blair, faced with Iraqi resistance, have taken to exclaiming ever more impatiently that "the Iraqi people will be freed" - whether they like it or not!

In Britain over 500,000 crammed the streets of London on 22 March in the biggest ever anti-war demo in war time - despite orchestrated appeals to "back our boys" now they were under fire, including from those, like the wretched Charles Kennedy,

who were supposedly against the war.

The increased support for Blair in the polls is almost all a result of those who were unsure before the war deciding to support British troops now. But the solid core of those who were against it on 15 February remains utterly opposed.

And an entirely new element has added strength to the anti-war movement. Thousands of schools students have rocked the country with their audacity in walking out of classes and their bravery in standing up to police brutality as they occupy towns and cities across Britain.

In Britain, the Stop the War coalition has called another national demonstration in London for 12 April. Whether the invasion is bogged down by dogged resistance or Baghdad is occupied we need to ensure that this demo is huge. The Labour lefts who oppose the war may suspend their fight to unseat Blair while the fighting continues, but the vast majority of the anti-war movement understands that the Iraqi people are paying a hideous price for every extra day that this war goes on.

As more bombs rain down on Baghdad's market places killing ever more civilians, the Iraqis are now paying the "blood price" that Blair demanded before the war started. Now we have to make him pay the political price.

But the national demonstration is only one weapon. It is essential that we replicate the various local actions that we saw in the days after the war started. Building local groups and actions is key to maintaining the mass character of the movement. And we must not just march: we must door step pro-war MPs, hold die-ins, lobby MPs' surgeries, surround bases, picket media headquarters and carry



**Build People's Assemblies!
 Strike against the war!
 Bring down Blair!**

on a campaign of blockades and mass civil disobedience.

College student unions should open up their facilities to school students during Easter to organise new actions and hold teach-ins.

But above all we must catch up with the anti-war movements in other parts of Europe and get effective strike action against the war. In Italy we have seen this already. In India, Kashmir was completely shut down for two days at the end of March in protest against the war.

But in Britain strikes and walk-outs from workplaces when the invasion

started were too few and small. This was in no small part because the trade union leaders opposed to war did not make a clear and unambiguous call on their members to take such action and so bring the country to a halt.

If factories shut down, if trains do not run, if mail is not delivered, if civil servants refuse to oil the machinery of government, then Blair can be forced to retreat. His preparedness for a "long haul" could be turned into a search for a quick way out.

But getting such action will not be easy. It is illegal, our leaders are

timid, most unions have no tradition of political strike action; many are not sure how to handle the arguments in the workplace.

It is for this reason that we urgently need to build local people's assemblies against the war in every city, borough and town. Already Manchester and Camberwell StW groups have backed the idea and are trying to get them off the ground. Others are following suit.

We should elect accountable delegates to these bodies from trade union branches, trades councils, local anti-war groups, schools, colleges, youth and women's organisations, community campaigns, left-wing political organisations and local Labour Party wards opposed to the war.

Such a powerful network of activists can deepen and broaden the anti-war movement, going beyond building local demonstrations to delivering local strikes. This can build the momentum and pressure union leaders into calling mass national strikes, and even a general strike to stop this war and get the troops out of Iraq.

And in May local elections in many towns and cities give the anti-war movement a chance to stand candidates on an anti-war platform against all the three main war parties.

The Socialist Alliance is standing at least 100 candidates on a Socialist Alliance Against the War ticket; local StW groups or local people's assemblies should stand as well, targeting the constituencies of pro-war MPs or local wards of pro-war councillors.

■ The people that run Washington planned this war from start to finish. Turn to pages 6&7 to find out how.

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

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Even the onset of war did not stop the global revolt against it.

Across the world the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence, in Asia at Hyderabad and in South America at Porto Alegre.

Together with the LRCI, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New

World Party of Socialist Revolution (a New International).

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against the war, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or e mail us at paper@workerspower.com.

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